

Ploys of Performance: Games and Play in the Ptochoprodromic Poems

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THE PTOCHOPRODROMIC POEMS: LANGUAGE, HUMOR, AND EPISODIC STRUCTURE

The value of the four so-called Ptochoprodromic Poems has long been recognized by historians for their unique vignettes of everyday life and their inventories of food-stuffs, items of clothing, and other realia.¹ Philologists and linguists have mined the text for rare lexical and morphological forms.² However, there has been far less unanimity as to their stylistic and literary merits. Three major stumbling blocks seem to have prevented them from being taken seriously as “literature”: the mixed levels of language, ranging from learned and semi-learned Greek to vulgar street slang; the coarseness of their humor, especially in matters relating to what goes into and out of the gut and belly; and their discursive, episodic structure. This article addresses each of these three issues, along with questions of authorship and dating, before moving on to a new approach to the poems—the poet’s use of games and play.

As for language, it is now generally recognized that vernacular forms emerged from within court circles in the course of the twelfth century, as part of a new confidence in language as a means of exploring multiple levels of expression and signification, rather than as an end in itself. Particularly relevant is the following extract from a letter addressed by Theodore Prodromos to the nomophylax Alexios Aristenos. Language, style, and communication figure throughout the letter as important matters of debate, but it

This paper is based on research carried out for an edition of the Ptochoprodromic Poems, with Greek text and facing English translation, introduction, commentary, and glossary, to be completed in collaboration with Michael Hendy. I should like to acknowledge my gratitude to Dumbarton Oaks, where most of the research was carried out during my term there as a summer fellow (1994), and to thank the following people for their generous advice: John Duffy, Angeliki E. Laiou, Alexander P. Kazhdan,[†] Henry Maguire, Eric McGeer, Ian Rutherford, Lee Sherry, and Sarolta Takács. I would also like to acknowledge special debts to Panagiotis Agapitos, Panagiotis Roilos, and Dimitris Yatromanolakis, who made invaluable suggestions.

¹See, especially, P. Koukoules, *Βυζαντινὸν Βίος καὶ Πολιτισμός*, 6 vols. (Athens, 1947–55); M. F. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy, c. 300–1450* (Cambridge, 1985), 514, 588; A. E. Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge, 1989), 205.

²D. C. Hesseling and H. Pernot, eds., *Poèmes Prodromiques en grec vulgaire* (Amsterdam, 1910), passim; N. P. Andriotis, *Lexikon der Archaismen in neugriechischen Dialekten* (Vienna, 1974); H. Eideneier, “Zu den Ptochoprodromika,” *BZ* 57 (1964): [300]; idem, *Ptochoprodromos: Einführung, kritische Ausgabe, deutsche Uebersetzung, Glossar*, *Neograeca Medii Aevi* (Cologne, 1991).

is clear from this passage that Prodrornos was interested in the difference between the language of the “cloth seller” and the “wise man”:

Οὐκ ἐπαινῶ γὰρ ἐγὼ τοῦτο τὸ μέρος τὸν Στρωματέα, εὐγλωττίαν μήποτε ζηλοῦν λέγοντα μηδὲ ῥημάτων εὐγένειαν, ἀρκεῖσθαι δὲ μόνῳ τῷ αἰνίξασθαι τὸ νοούμενον. Ἀδιάφορος γὰρ ἂν οὕτω καὶ ὁ βλατοπώλης εἴη καὶ ὁ σοφός. Ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς μικροῦ ἂν ἢ οὐδὲ τοῦ τυχόντος λόγου τὴν γλῶτταν ἡξίωσα, εἰ γυμναῖς ταῖς ψυχαῖς διεζῶμεν, τὸν ὁμόζυγον τοῦτον ὑπερανabάντες πηλόν. Ἐπεὶ καὶ ὁ τοῦ σώματος οὗτος ὀλκός, ὁ ὀργανικός, φημί, ἀνδριάς, τὰς ἡμετέρας ψυχὰς περιπέπλασται, καὶ οὐκ ἔξδον ἀμέσως τὰ τοῦ νοὸς ἡμῖν ἐμφανισθῆναι κινήματα, οὐ δευτέρας οἶμαι δεῖν ἀξιοῦν τὴν γλῶσσαν τιμῆς.

I do not praise Clement where he claims in the *Stromata* never to strive for eloquence and nobility of diction but to be satisfied with merely touching upon the sense. *For thus there would be no difference between the cloth seller and the wise man.* I too would have counted language as of meager or no import if we transcended this clay that is yoked to us and could pass through life with naked souls. But since this burden of the body—I refer to this living statue—has been formed around our souls, and since it is not possible for mental processes to be intimated to us directly, I consider it imperative to rate language as of no secondary importance.³

Alexander Kazhdan and Ann Epstein suggest that within imperial circles, both vernacular and learned forms of language were employed, and not infrequently by the same author according to occasion and context.⁴ This raises the question: What degree of variation was permitted between learned and vernacular forms *within the same text*, as is indubitably the case with each of the four Ptochoprodromic Poems? Michael Jeffreys finds it “difficult to accept the picture of generations of Byzantine intellectuals who experiment in popular language yet fail to carry through their experiments to the logical conclusion of a completely vernacular poem. The education of such men was directed entirely to the elimination of mistakes from their writing, towards the preservation of a uniform linguistic level. If they decided to experiment with the vernacular, surely at least one man could have been found in several centuries to impose a similar uniformity on his demotic writing?”⁵ Yet if, as Ihor Ševčenko and Robert Browning have maintained, it is more appropriate to think of the varieties of style in Byzantine literature in terms not of “language” but of “register,” then the issue of “linguistic inconsistencies” is infinitely more complex, especially if we are dealing with “genre poems,” as Kazhdan and Simon Franklin suggest.⁶ Moreover, with regard to the proliferation of forms, Browning notes that it is probable that there existed “a common tongue in which a great many alternative forms, belonging historically to different dialects, were acceptable. Men from all over the Greek world mingled in Constantinople as they did nowhere else.”⁷ Was not Jeffreys parachronistically projecting onto twelfth-century Constantinople our own, modern, and Western,

³PG 133:1265A–B. The passage is cited in A. P. Kazhdan and S. Franklin, *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1983), 111. I have preferred to cite the full text in Greek, with a more literal translation.

⁴A. P. Kazhdan and A. Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkeley–Los Angeles, 1985), 84.

⁵M. J. Jeffreys, “The Literary Emergence of Vernacular Greek,” *Mosaic* 8.4 (1975): 176.

⁶I. Ševčenko, “Levels of Style in Byzantine Prose,” *JÖB* 31 (1981): 289–312; R. A. Browning, “The Language of Byzantine Literature,” *Βυζαντινὰ καὶ Μεταβυζαντινὰ*, ed. S. Vryonis, vol. 1 (Malibu, 1978), 103; Kazhdan and Franklin, *Studies*, 91.

⁷R. A. Browning, *Medieval and Modern Greek*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, 1983), 82.

notions of linguistic homogeneity and purity and, in particular, notions of the Greek “demotic,” which go back only to the last decades of the nineteenth century?⁸

The following passage from poem I of the Ptochoprodromic Poems has been taken by some scholars as proof that such a learned writer as Theodore Prodromos could not have been the author of these poems: the genitive γυναικός does not agree with the qualifying participle προβάλλουσα, subject of the main verb προφέρεται.⁹ Yet the sudden switch of levels is both vivid and effective: having listed the diseases he does not suffer from, the poet now names his actual affliction (an awful wife), then “performs” her complaints in an alliterative nominative clause:

- 15 Κἂν φαίνωμαι γάρ, δέσποτα, γελῶν ὁμοῦ καὶ παίζων,
 ἀλλ' ἔχω πόνον ἀπειρον καὶ θλίψιν βαρυτάτην,
 καὶ χαλεπὸν ἄρρώστημα, καὶ πάθος, ἀλλὰ πάθος.
 Πάθος ἀκούσας τοιγαροῦν μὴ κήλη ὑπολάβῃς,
 μὴδ' ἄλλο τι χειρότερον ἐκ τῶν μυστικωτέρων,
 20 μὴ κερατᾶν τὸ φανερόν, μὴ τανταντοτραγάτην,
 μὴ νόσημα καρδιακόν, μὴ περιφλεγμονίαν,
 μὴ σκορδαψόν, μὴδ' ὕδερν, μὴ παραπνευμονίαν,
 ἀλλὰ μαχίμου γυναικὸς πολλὴν εὐτραπείαν,
 προβλήματα προβάλλουσα καὶ πιθανολογίας
 25 καὶ τὸ δοκεῖν εὐλόγως μοι προφέρεται πλουτάρχως.

20 ταραντοταρτάνην· Eideneier | 21 καρδιακόν: heartburn, not heart disease; see Alexiou and Hendy, forthcoming.

- 15 Although I seem, lord, to laugh and play at once,
 I am oppressed by endless grief and burdensome affliction,
 by grave indisposition, and suffering—what suffering!
 Hearing of suffering, do not suppose I have a rupture,
 or any other of the graver, inward ills,
 20 it's no eyesores, plain to see, nor shivering fever either,
 no heartburn, nor inflammation of the lung,
 no gut-rotting shit-face, no dropsy, nor bronchial ills.
 No, I have a warring wife, whose tongue wags on and on,
 pugnaciously parading parapets and predictions,
 25 redundantly recounting me the rightness of her cause.

“Mistakes” of agreement, particularly between subject and participle, had been in common usage since the second century A.D. (papyrus letters), and are consistent with the gradual disappearance of the declined active participle attested in Romanos the Melodist.¹⁰ The linguistic grounds for rejecting Theodore Prodromos as possible author of our four poems are based on false assumptions.

We move now to our second area of doubt: Is our poet's sense of humor too base to be attributed to Theodore Prodromos? Cyril Mango complains that he “tries to be clever

⁸See D. Tziouvas, *The Nationalism of the Demoticists and Its Impact on Their Literary Theory* (Amsterdam, 1986).

⁹Hesseling and Pernot, *Poèmes Prodromiques*; Eideneier, *Ptochoprodromos*.

¹⁰Papyrus letters: μοῦ κινδινεύσαντος εἰς θάλασσαν ἔσωσε εὐθέως, cited in G. Thomson, *The Greek Language* (Cambridge, 1966), 46, no. 19.5. Romanos: see K. Mitsakis, *The Language of Romanos the Melodist* (Munich, 1967), 158–59, no. 306. A comparable lapse of syntax can be found in Prodromos' *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, IV.65 (Bryaxis' letter to Mystilos): ἡ γοῦν Βρυάξην κατὰ σοῦ κινῶν μάθε. I owe the last example to P. Roilos.

without being funny”; that the poems contain “too much slapstick,” or are “frequently obsessed with what everyone has to eat,” echoing the earlier strictures of Dirk Christian Hesseling and Hubert Pernot, and Henry Tozer. It is perhaps easier to appreciate another culture’s sense of history, or tragedy, than it is their sense of humor, simply because we take it for granted that what fails to amuse us cannot, by its very nature, be “funny.”¹¹ Yet, as Mikhail Bakhtin has indicated in his essays on Rabelais, premodern parody differs from its modern literary counterparts precisely in the regenerative nature of imagery drawn from “the human body with its food, drink, defecation, and sexual life.” Two types of imagery converge, Bakhtin argues, especially at the crossroads of medieval parody and early Renaissance realism, the one drawn from the culture of folk humor, the other from the bourgeois concept of the individual.¹² Rabelais and his world may seem a far cry indeed from twelfth-century Constantinople, but I hope to show that the Ptochoprodromic Poems share the same features of dialogic interaction and regenerative humor as those discussed by Bakhtin, and in ways that were in important respects independent of, and prior to, the medieval West.

As an example of comic humor, or games and play but with a serious purpose, let us examine what I regard as two paired “keystone themes” developed throughout the four poems: pain and disease, death and resurrection, which are counterposed to games and play. The theme of pain and disease is introduced at the beginning of poem I, with reference to *pónos* and *páthos*, as we have just seen. Prodromos’ itemization of the afflictions, both external and internal, that do *not* beset him affords him his first chance for a scatological joke: one thing I do not have, he reassures his addressee and patron, John II, is *skordapsós*. This is not “eye disease” (*Augenleiden*), as rendered by Hans Eideneier, but “gut-rot,” a vernacular form of χορδαῖος (χορδή + ἄπτω), πάθος τῶν ἐντέρων (Hesychios, s.v.). Theophanes Continuator (cf. III.25j) adds the particularly nasty detail that the ailment involved obstruction of the intestines, causing the patient to vomit feces from the mouth.¹³ No, Prodromos continues, my *páthos* is not *skordapsós*, but something much worse—a nagging wife! It is thanks to her, he implies, that he is obliged to vomit so much “shit language” from his mouth; all these ills could be cured if only he were given more money! By the end of poem I, the links between domestic discord and imperial malaise have been established by the implied contrast between Prodromos’ own dire straits and imminent death (unless rescued by his patron’s munificence), and by the comic but curious interlude of his baby son’s fall from “on high,” whence portents descend, with instant “resurrection” thereafter (I.219: τοῦ πάθους καταπαύσαντος, τοῦ βρέφους δ’ ἀναστάντος). Baby’s resurrection is effected by his wife’s female neighbors, the illicit *mandragourai*, “sorceresses” (I.211).¹⁴ In poems II, III, and IV, Prodromos elaborates, especially in the

¹¹C. Mango, *Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome* (New York, 1981), 251; cf. Hesseling and Pernot, *Poèmes Prodromiques*, passim; H. J. Tozer, “Byzantine Satire,” *JHS* 2 (1892): 233–70.

¹²M. M. Bakhtin, *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable* (1965), trans. *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington, Ind., 1984), 18–24.

¹³Eideneier, *Ptochoprodromos*, 122. For analogies to sound shifts from initial k- to sk-, cf. AG κόνις, MG σκόνι; for sch- to sk-, cf. AG σχολεῖον, MG σκολιό. John Duffy has pointed out to me that both shifts may be assisted by a pun on σκῶρ, gen. σκατός.

¹⁴On the significance of portents from “on high,” see A. P. Kazhdan, “Byzantine Hagiography and Sex in the Fifth to Twelfth Centuries,” *DOP* 44 (1990): 140, who cites the 10th-century *vita* of St. Irene of Chrysobalanton, *BHG* 952 (*Life of St. Irene, Abbess of Chrysobalanton*, ed. J. O. Rosenqvist [Uppsala, 1986], 52–64): Irene, a girl from a Cappadocian family, settled in a convent, but her former suitor found a magician who bewitched

proem, final episode, and epilogue, the theme of *páthos* in relation to his children (II), monastic life (III), and Constantinople's artisanate (IV), but always returning to his key political complaint, or warning, that his imperial patron will suffer from his divine one unless he gives succor to subordinates. In return, Prodromos offers τινὰς πολιτικοὺς ἀμέτρους πάλιν στίχους, / συνεσταλμένους, παίζοντας, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀνασχαιτῶντας, / παίζουσι γὰρ γέροντες, ἀλλὰ σωφρονεστέρως (I.9–11). "*Politikos*" here carries more than one meaning. Beneath Prodromos' humor lies a serious purpose; so much for the second in the litany of complaints against his literary style.

As to the third issue, the episodic and discursive structure of the four poems, if we lay aside our preference for a linear, ordered narrative and analyze the episodes in relation to their historical and performative contexts, we shall see how much insight they afford across a wide and crucial range of twelfth-century issues in relation to the imperial court: gender and marital relations; household economy and authority; conjugal rights and role reversals; family life and cost of living; monastic inequities and nefarious practices; the low status of the scholar in comparison with the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker. But their literary qualities? I have chosen to summarize the episodic structure of poem I as a whole, and to illustrate the last two episodes in detail, because, although reviled by scholars as containing "non-sens indiscutables,"¹⁵ they can be shown to make perfect sense—and afford us with some performative fun—if we are prepared to shed our preconceptions and do a little homework. It is precisely the episodic structure of the poems that permits Prodromos to develop to the full his use of games and play.

Poem I is framed by a proem and closing address, as are the other poems, with frequent interventions to the emperor, John II, in the course of the narrated dialogues and events. Prodromos sets the scene cunningly. The tone sounds cringing, but nothing is quite what it seems. He wants to give "equal recompense" (ἀνταμοιβὴν ἐξισωμένην) to the "bright benefactions" (λαμπρὰς εὐεργεσίας, perhaps also meaning "glittering new coins") he has received from his patron in the past (I.2–3), but he undercuts the implied compliment by offering in return his own ambivalent verses (πολιτικοὺς ἀμέτρους στίχους . . . συνεσταλμένους, παίζοντας, I.9–10). *Politikos* here, as before, refers simultaneously to the popular fifteen-syllable verse form (*politikos stichos*), to matters of state, to the city, and to currency.¹⁶ He begs his patron to *listen* to what he *writes* (ἄκουσον ἅπερ γράφω), because, although his *pónos* is real enough, he can be playful at the same time (γελῶν ὁμῶς καὶ παίζων, I.15), "clowning wisely" with verses that may lack perfume but not spice, thereby drawing attention from the outset to the four poems' enduring theme of food, but with a subversive edge. What is more, he is no novice, but one who has enjoyed imperial favor

her with an attack of lust. The Mother of God appeared to her in a vision, then sent the martyr Anastasia and Basil the Great, who came flying down with a package weighing three pounds and containing magic devices (including two leaden puppets resembling Irene and her suitor). Once these *goûteûmata* were consigned to the flames, Irene was liberated from her sexuality. The parallels with the Prodromic text include sexuality denied on earth and magic recuperation sent from the heavens. On the multiple and ambivalent meanings of *mandragourai*, see P. Koukoules, "Ἑτυμολογικά," *Athena* 57 (1953): 213; A. Papamichael, *Birth and Plant Symbolism: Symbolic and Magical Uses of Plants in Connection with Birth in Modern Greece* (Athens, 1975), 33–56.

¹⁵Hesseling and Pernot, *Poèmes Prodromiques*, passim; P. Speck, "'Interpolations et non-sens indiscutables': Das erste Gedicht der Ptochoprodromos," *Poikila Byzantina* 4 (1984): 274–309.

¹⁶See Hendy, *Studies*, 137, 138, 159, 573, on *politikos* as opposed to *strategikos* to imply favors and strife in public and private matters.

in the past—a probable reference to an earlier poem addressed to John II by Theodore Prodromos—and now hopes to win it back.¹⁷

The core of poem I (lines 26–197) is built around four episodes, each linked by a transitional intervening address to John II, which serves to remind us of the narrating instant, the imperial court. The first two episodes are composed largely of dialogue, giving us not only a taste of Mrs. Prodromos' lively tongue, but also some rare insights into household economy and authority, conjugal rights, and role reversal. In episode one (I.42–112), Mrs. Prodromos has four complaints. First (I.46–62), he never buys her clothes or jewelry for cash, but brings back instead useless old things from the palace. The items she mentions (διβίκιν, θάλασσαν) are hard to identify precisely, but probably infer precious cloths and textiles given out to favored clients by imperial patrons, of priceless value to any household but not necessarily exchangeable for cash.¹⁸ Beneath the humorous surface, Prodromos is telling the emperor how little respect his wife (and others of her upstart ilk) has for the court. He also decries *her* mercenary demands, while at the same time asking *his* patron for more money. Second, she utilizes a classic eristic comic *topos*, contrasting her “high” status with his “base” one—“you are x, I am y,” etc. She suggests that the inequity of their respective social and financial status invalidates their marriage:

- Ἐπεντρανίζεις, ἄνθρωπε, κἄν ὅλως θεωρεῖς με;
 ἐγὼ ἤμην ὑποληπτική καὶ σὺ ἤσουν ματζουκάτος·
 ἐγὼ ἤμην εὐγενική καὶ σὺ πτωχὸς πολίτης,
 70 σὺ εἶσαι Πτωχοπρόδρομος καὶ ἐγὼ ἤμην Ματζουκίνη,
 σὺ ἐκοιμῶ εἰς τὸ ψιαθὶν καὶ ἐγὼ εἰς τὸ κλινάριν·
 ἐγὼ εἶχον προῖκα περισσὴν καὶ σὺ εἶχες ποδο[. . . .]
 ἐγὼ εἶχον ἀσημοχρύσαφον, καὶ σὺ εἶχες σκαφοδούγας,
 καὶ σκάφην τοῦ ζυμώματος καὶ μέγαν πυροστάτην.

72 ποδονήπτριν Legrand; ποδοκόπιν Papadimitriou: cf. *Ar. Nub.* 25–55; *Alkiphr.* I.6

- Why gaze so into space, can't you look me in the eye?
 I was of good household, you wore a soldier's club;
 I was of noble stock, you were just a pauper.
 70 You are poor old Prodromos, I am from Matzouka.
 You used to sleep on mats of straw, I slept on a bed;
 I brought dowry gifts a-plenty, you just errand [-tips];
 I brought gold and silverware; you your scrubbing boards,
 one board for kneading dough, and a great big cooking pot.

In fact, according to Angeliki Laiou, it was perfectly normal for a wife's dowry to include all such items as are here named, while the general trend from the eleventh to the fourteenth century was for the value of the dowry, in relation to the groom's portion, to increase from one-half to two-thirds.¹⁹ Once again, Prodromos is using his wife's unrea-

¹⁷See A. Maiuri, “Una nuova poesia di Teodoro Prodromo in greco volgare,” *BZ* 23 (1914–18): 397–407. For parallels in Prodromos' historical poems, see W. Hörandner, *Theodoros Prodromos: Historische Gedichte*, WByzSt 11 (Vienna, 1974), 481–82.

¹⁸On costume, see *DOC* 4.1: 159–61 (θάλασσα), 157 (διβιτίσιον), and footnotes; on the value of textiles to households, see N. Oikonomides, “The Contents of the Byzantine House from the Eleventh to the Fifteenth Centuries,” *DOP* 44 (1990): 204–15.

¹⁹A. E. Laiou, *Gender, Society and Economic Life in Byzantium* (Nottingham, 1992), 203, 237.

sonable complaint to upgrade his own remunerations. Her third complaint concerns their house (by implication, her gift on marriage). Once grand, it is now in a state of rack and ruin. A dilapidated house was a portent of ill boding not just for its inmates, but for army, emperor, and state alike.²⁰ This is one of the very few detailed descriptions we have in Byzantine literature of a well-to-do house. Yet the medical metaphors (ἀνεπράψω, περιπράψη) take us back to the key theme of the poem—disease and death. Fourth, there are the household chores. Here, Mrs. Prodrimos's complaints have a curiously modern ring, rather like "I run three companies, bring up the kids, and manage the household. I also drive the car!" Again, according to Laiou's evidence, her position of having basement workshops and an estate within the household would have been enviable indeed in the twelfth century, and, still, all she does is complain.²¹

The transitional section to episode two (I.113–22) suggests the parodic treatment to follow of the twin Byzantine concepts of heroism and warfare, and the ambivalent nature of language and truth, that are central to the Prodromic *oeuvre*. Critics have ridiculed the apparent "non-sens" of lines 133 through 148, where Prodrimos discloses to the emperor an awful incident from the distant past. What is meant by his insistence that he went home from the palace alone, without an armed retinue? And what do we make of his wife's accusations that he beat her when, according to the text, he was just in a foul—and tipsy—temper at finding nothing to eat:

- Ἐγὼ δ' ὥς ἤμην νησιτικὸς ἀπὸ τὸ φιλοπότιν,
 μὴ κρύψω τὴν αἰτίαν μου καὶ ἔχω πολλάκις κρίμα,
 140 ὥσάν ἐμελαγχόλησα καὶ ἡγριολόλησά την,
 καὶ πάλιν τὰ συνήθη μοι συμφώνως ἐπεφώνει·
 –τὸ τί θαρρεῖς, τὸ τίς εἶσαι, τὸ βλέπε τίνα δέρεις·
 ποῖαν ὑβρίζεις πρόσεχε καὶ ποῖαν ἀτιμάζεις·
 οὐκ εἶμαι σθλαβοποῦλα σου, οὐδὲ μισθάρνισσά σου.
 145 Πῶς ἤπλωσας ἐπάνω μου; τὸ πῶς οὐκ ἐνετράπη;
 τὰ βρώσιμα ἐπεκύρωσας καὶ τὰ ποτὰ ὡσαύτως,
 τὰ πάντα ἐξεστράγγισας καὶ ἐποίκες με ἐρημήτριαν.
 Ἄν ἴδωσι τὰ ὀμμάτια μου ποτὲ τοὺς ἀδερφοὺς μου,
 καὶ οὐ πιάσουν καὶ ἀψιδώσουν σε καὶ δεῖξουν καὶ τελέσουν,
 150 καὶ δῆσω σου εἰς τὸν τράχηλον τὰ τέσσαρα παιδιά,
 καὶ βάλω εἰς τὴν καρδίαν μου τὰ γόνιμά μου κέρδη,
 καὶ ἐκβάλω σε ἐκ τὸ ὀσπίτιν μου μετὰ πομπῆς μεγάλης,
 νὰ ποῖσω καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον καὶ τὴν ὑπόληψίν σου,
 νὰ ποῖσω τὴν κουδοῦπαν σου αὐτὴν τὴν μαδισμένην.

²⁰See Koukoules, Βίος, 4:294–67; C. Bouras, "Houses in Byzantium," Δελτ. Ἐτ. Ἑλλ. 11 (1982–83): 1–16.

²¹Laiou cites evidence from the 11th and 12th centuries to show, first, that it was normal for aristocratic women to provide full household management (*Gender*, 186–93) and second, that "within the household, the model occupation for a woman was spinning, weaving and making cloth" (*ibid.*, 242–43). Moreover, with the assistance of her servants (ψυχάρια, line 88), Mrs. Prodrimos would have been in the enviable position of producing cloth not merely for household consumption, but for sale in the market to her own advantage, as Laiou notes of the Vlach woman in poem IV, line 249 (*ibid.*, 190–91). Harvey (*Economic Expansion*, 190–91) testifies to the increase in urban building during the later 12th century, as also to the reconstruction of older mansions to accommodate workshops within domestic residences. Such workshops, situated on the ground floor, were lucrative sources for developed domestic economic production in Constantinople, especially among the families of senior officials; see Bouras, "Houses," 22.

- As for me, starving as I was after too much drink,
 I won't conceal the cause lest I commit a sin,
 140 I flew into a rage and spoke angrily to her.
 At that she started yelling in her usual fashion:
 –How dare you? Who are you? Watch out whom you thrash;
 and –Mind your tongue, take care whom you dishonor;
 I'm not your Slavic serf girl, not even your paid servant.
 145 How dare you lay your hands on me! Are you not ashamed?
 You've polished off the food, finished all the drink,
 you've creamed off everything, I'm broke as some old hermit.
 If I set eyes one day upon my brothers, just see
 if they don't catch you, break your back and kill you off,
 150 or else I'll fasten our four children right around your neck.
 I'll keep the profits of my labors entirely to myself,
 I'll turn you out of house and home, parade you in disgrace,
 I'll ruin that fine face of yours, and your reputation,
 and fix your ugly, plucked-out mug for good and all!

Once more, Laiou's legal evidence on coercion and consent in sexual relations helps us to make sense of this episode. First, if the man's use of armed force can be proved on the occasion of marriage, even where the woman's prior consent is shown, he will be deemed guilty of abduction. Where other evidence is absent, she can "cry out in the wilderness," always summoning other (usually female) witnesses to her aid.²² Second, wife beating was by no means uncommon; but a wife was entitled to scream for help in case of severe abuse in order to secure the punishment of the offender. Prodrornos is telling the emperor that his wife is determined to prove him guilty, although he didn't lift a finger against her! What is more, the imperial court is to blame: too much drinking on an empty stomach (and pocket). Viewed in this way, the episode includes splendid racy dialogue, and also implies that the source of domestic troubles lies in the imperial court itself.

If episodes one and two have attracted adverse critical comment, episodes three and four have been reviled as unworthy of any decent writer, let alone Theodore Prodrornos. Hesseling and Pernot "have never come across such nonsensical buffooneries in appalling comic taste."²³ But Prodrornos, like other comic writers, was capable of more than one type of humor, and merely shifts comic mode from the predominantly verbal humor of the first two episodes to humor of situation and action, commonly known as slapstick, with incidents ranging from horseplay to coarse lavatory humor with strong sexual innuendoes. The predominantly dialogic mode of the first two episodes now turns to narrative, interspersed with interior monologue and dialogue, as Prodrornos craftily directs his audience's attention to his own pitiful state.

There is one thread that connects all the seemingly disjointed incidents in the last two episodes with each other, and with the sense and structure of the poem as a whole: the frolics of carnival and entertainment, as performed at the imperial court and among the urban population, where roles are reversed, and where the *sacra* of imperial ceremony and liturgy might be mocked with impunity. The salient features of Byzantine

²²A. E. Laiou, "Sex, Consent, and Coercion," in *Consent and Coercion to Sex in Ancient and Medieval Societies*, ed. A. E. Laiou (Washington, D.C., 1993), 140–42, 158, 181–84 (use of force); 163–67 (woman's cry of protest regarded as evidence of man's guilt).

²³Hesseling and Pernot, *Poèmes Prodromiques*, 14, 87–89.

carnival may be summarized as follows. On certain occasions, including public holidays and saints' days, it was customary for mock processions to take place, during the course of which participants would dress up (men in women's costumes, women in men's, people in animal masks and skins), hurl things at one another, engage in mock battle and races with staffs, spears, and other weapons.²⁴ Such antics, already hinted at in lines 36 through 39, are given full expression in episode three. When Prodromos' wife threatens to have him beaten up and cast out as a beggar, his first thought is to seize a staff, cast his hat askew (ρίψον τὸ καμελαύχιν . . . τὸ καμελαύκιν στράβωσον, I.165–71), then roll a stone in her direction and run as if to catch her, roaring like a lion with a wild look in his eyes (I.161–71). There follows the hilarious incident in which Prodromos, failing to find a staff, grabs a broomstick from the privy. He and his wife have a fight on either side of the broomstick, which he pokes through a hole in her bedroom door; she loosens her hold just as he is "coming strong." He ends up on his back:

- 'Ως δ' οὐδὲ ράβδον ἐφευρεῖν ὁ τάλας ἡδυνήθην,
 ἀπαίρω τὸ σκουπόρραβδον γοργὸν ἀπὸ τὴν χρεῖαν,
 παρακαλῶν, εὐχόμενος, καὶ δυσωπῶν καὶ λέγων·
 175 –Πανάχραντέ μου, κράτει τὴν, ἐμπόδιζε, Χριστέ μου,
 μὴ παίξῃ κοντογύρισμα καὶ ἐπάρῃ τὸ ραβδὶν μου,
 καὶ δώσῃ καὶ ποιήσῃ μὲ στραβὸν παρὰ διαβόλου.
 'Ως δὴ αὐτῇ, θεόστεπτε, πρὸ τῶν λοιπῶν ἀπάντων,
 καὶ τὸ ψωμὶν ἐκλείδωσε καὶ τὸ κρασὶν ἐντάμα,
 180 φεύγει, λανθάνει, κρύπτεται, καὶ κλείσασα τὴν θύραν,
 ἐκάθισεν ἀμέριμνος καὶ ἐμὲ ἀφῆκεν ἔξω.
 Κρατῶν δὲ τὸ σκουπόρραβδον, τὴν θύραν ἀπηρξάμην·
 ὥς δ' ἡγανάκτησα λοιπὸν κρούων σφοδρῶς τὴν θύραν,
 εὐρῶν ὅπῃ ἐσέβασα τ' ἄκρον τοῦ σκουπορράβδου·
 185 ἐκείνῃ δὲ πηδήσασα καὶ τούτου δραξαμένη
 ἐταύριζεν ἀπέσωθεν, ἐγὼ δὲ πάλιν ἔξω·
 ὥς δ' ἔγνω ὅτι δύναμαι καὶ στερεὰ τὴν σύρω,
 χαυνίζει τὸ σκουπόρραβδον, τὴν θύραν παρανοίγει,
 καὶ παρ' ἐλπίδα κατὰ γῆς καταπεσὼν ἠπλώθην.
 190 'Ως δ' εἶδεν ὅτι ἔπεσον, ἤρξατο τοῦ γελᾶν με,
 ἐκβαίνει καὶ σηκώνει με γοργὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ πάτου,
 καὶ τάχα κολακεύουσα τοιαῦτα προσεφώνει·
 –'Εντρέπου, κύρι, νὰ σωθῇς· ἐντρέπου κἂν ὀλίγον,
 οὐκ εἶσαι χωρικοτούσικον, οὐδὲ μικρὸν νινίτσιν·
 195 κατάλειπον τὴν δύναμιν, τὴν περισσὴν ἀνδρείαν,
 καὶ φρόνει–καλοκαίριν ἐν – τίμα τοὺς κρεῖττονάς σου,
 καὶ μὴ παλλικαρρεύεσαι, μηδὲ λαξοφαρδεύῃς.²⁵

182 ἡραξάμην *propos*. Kapsomenos | 196 καλλιωτέριν *corr.* Andriotis;
 ἐν' Hesseling et Pernot; ἐν' *propos*. Agapitos | 197 λαξοφαρδεύῃς *corr.* Legrand

²⁴See *ODB*, s.v. "carnival"; Koukoules, *Bíos*, 3:263–68.

²⁵On the vexing question of conjugal rights to sexual intercourse, much debated in the later 12th century, see Laiou, "Sex," 109, 181–90. The sexual innuendoes in this passage have close verbal precedents in ancient comedy and literature. Examples include:

172. ράβδον (176, 182, 184, 188), "penis"; cf. Archil. 31.1: Ὑακινθίνῃ με ράβδωι / χαλεπῶς Ἔρωις ραπίζων / ἐκέλευε συντροχάζειν; Diog. Laert. 25, 28.

180. τὴν θύραν (182, 183), "vagina"; cf. Ar. *Lys.* 310–11: ἅπαντες εἴτ' ἐς θύραν κρητὸν ἐμπέσοιμεν; / κἂν μὴ καλούτων τοὺς μοχλοὺς χαλῶσιν αἱ γυναῖκες.

- Well, as I couldn't even find a staff, poor wretch,
 I quickly grabbed the broomstick from the privy,
 pleading, beseeching, importuning, crying out in misery:
 175 –All-immaculate one, control her, stop the bitch, my Christ,
 or else she'll turn around and take my stick away,
 and then use it to beat me more crooked than the Devil!–
 As for herself, God-crowned one, before what next transpired,
 she had placed the bread and wine under lock and key.
 180 Sneaking furtively away, she closed the door behind her,
 and, leaving me outside, she just sat there regardless.
 With the broomstick in my hands, I began to ply her door;
 and, aroused with fury as I was, I battered hard upon it.
 Just then I found a little hole, and poked inside my stick end.
 185 In quick response she got up and held fast onto my stick.
 We kept shafting, she from the inside, me from outside
 just as she knew my potency and I had her firmly grasped,
 she came, loosens on the broomstick, sets the door ajar,
 and there I was, quite suddenly, stretched out upon the ground.
 190 When she saw I'd fallen down, she started mocking me,
 as she came to help me from where I was laid down.
 Feigning love and tender care, here is what she said:
 –Shame on you, lord, on your life! have you no pride?
 you are no village tomboy, nor no whining baby!
 195 Leave off your potency, your excessive manliness,
 and have the sense this summer time, give honor to your betters,
 stop trying to play hero, cease your bellowing howls!

The curious incident of Prodromos' infant son, who falls from "on high" to be miraculously restored by women *μανδραγούραι* (I.206–20), can likewise be explained in terms of games and play. "Wonderworkers" (*θαυματουργοί*) were frequently called upon to perform at weddings, festivities, and imperial banquets, slitting throats and severing heads and then bringing their victims back to life. In Prodromos' *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, a magician named Satyrion entertains two satraps, Gobryas and Artaxanes, at a banquet. Satyrion slits his own throat with a sword, draws blood, and falls dead to the ground (*καὶ νέκυσ εἰς γῆν ἄθλιος Σατυρίων / κεῖται πρὸ πάντων ἐκκελύμενος φρένας*), until lamented by Artaxanes and touched by Gobryas' wand at the same time as the words *ἄνθρωπε . . . ἐξανάστα καὶ βίου* are uttered, at the bidding of the mighty lord Mystilos, who is thereafter praised as the Sun king (IV.214–42).

Recalling the dead to life, chief among the miracle acts, is the key theme in this episode, which not only afforded the then-starving Prodromos with the chance to sneak to the cupboard and steal a quick snack, but allows him now, in the telling of the tale, to hint that if street women can save his child, so too can the emperor save his Prodromos.

182. ἀπηρξάμην, "get started; practice" (as on a musical instrument), LSJ.

183. κρούων τὴν θύραν, "bang at the door"; cf. Ar. *Eccl.* 316, 989: ὅταν γε κρούσης τὴν ἐμὴν πρῶτον θύραν.

184. ὀπὴν, "vagina"; cf. Ar. *Lys.* 720: τὴν μὲν γε πρώτην διαλέγουσαν τὴν ὀπὴν.

186. ἐταύριζεν (MG τραβῶ), "shaft"; ταῦρος, "penis": Ar. *Lys.* 81.

188. χαυνίζει, "open wide," "gape." Used of sexual release: Eust. Makr. *Hysm.* 3.22–35; of wanton hetaira's kisses: Ephippus in Kock *CAF* 2.254.6, paraphrased as τις κωμικὸς εἰπὼν ὡς ἐκολάκευσεν οὐ συμπέσσασα τὸ στόμα ὥσπερ πολέμιος, ἀλλὰ τοῖσι στρουθίοις χαυνοῦσα ὁμοίως. Eust. *Thess.* 1411.8.

Beneath the humor lurks the hint of the subversive parallel with the Resurrection of Christ.

- Τοῦ γοῦν ἡλίου πρὸς δυσμὰς μέλλοντος ἤδη κλίνει²⁶
 βοή τις ἄφνω [γίνεται] καὶ ταραχὴ μεγάλη,
 ἐν καὶ γὰρ τῶν παίδων μου ἔπεσεν ἐκ τοῦ ὕψους,
 καὶ κρούσαν κάτω ἔκειτο ὥσπερ νεκρὸν αὐτίκα·
 210 συνήχθησαν αἱ γείτονες ὡς πρὸς παρηγορίαν,
 αἱ μανδραγοῦραι μάλιστα καὶ πρωτοκουρκουσοῦραι.
 καὶ τότε ἅς εἶδες θόρυβον καὶ ταραχὴν μεγάλην.
 Ἀσχολουμένων τοιγαροῦν τῶν γυναικῶν καὶ πάντων
 τῶν συνελθόντων ἐπ' αὐτῷ, ὡς φθάσας +εἶπον+ ἄνω,
 215 τοῦ βρέφους τῷ συμπτώματι καὶ τοῦ παιδὸς τῷ πάθει,
 κρυπτῶς ἀπῆρα τὸ κλειδὶν, καὶ ἤνοιξα τὸ ἀρμάριν·
 φαγῶν εὐθύς τε καὶ πῶν καὶ κορεσθεῖς ἐξαίφνης,
 ἐξῆλθον ἐξῶθεν καγὼ θρηνῶν σὺν τοῖς ἐτέροις.
 Τοῦ πάθους καταπαύσαντος, τοῦ βρέφους δ' ἀναστάντος,
 220 ἀπεχαιρέτησαν εὐθύς οἱ συνδεδραμηκότες . . .
- The sun, forsooth, was on the point of setting to the west,
 when there arises a loud cry, and a great commotion:
 one of my children, indeed, had fallen from on high!
 Dashed to the ground, he lay there, good as dead,
 210 when up ran neighbor women with their condolences,
 all those prize peddlars in magic gossip came,
 then what hubbub and commotion were there for you to see!
 With womenfolk thus preoccupied, as were all who
 gathered round, having reached, as I said before, the scene
 215 of baby's accident, the child's great suffering,
 I furtively removed the key, and opened up the cupboard.
 After sudden assuagement of drink and hunger pangs,
 I went straight out again, lamenting with the others.
 When his suffering ceased, and baby resurrected,
 220 bystanders and onlookers dispersed and took their leave.

In the final episode, Prodromos is constrained by starvation and by exclusion from the family table to dress up as a Slavic mendicant pilgrim, only to be beaten off by his own children, and readmitted at the end by his wife, who thereby realizes her earlier threat to reduce him to a state of destitution. But, he concludes, if even *she* took pity on me, your best congratulator, so must you, crowned emperor, show me compassion now by giving me more money, just as you wish for succor from Christ:

- Τοιαῦτα πέπονθα δεινά, κρατάρχα στεφηφόρε,
 παρὰ μαχίμου γυναικὸς καὶ τρισαλιτηρίας,
 270 ὡς εἶδε με κενώτατα ἐλθόντα πρὸς τὸν οἶκον.
 Ἄν οὖν μὴ φθάσῃ με τὸ σὸν φιλεῦσπλαγχνον, αὐτάναξ,
 καὶ δώροις καὶ χαρίσμασι τὴν ἄπληστον ἐμπλήσῃς,

²⁶The phrase is deliberately portentous. The verb κλίνει humorously marks the transition from redundant emphasis on the noun κλίνη in the previous twenty-five lines (four times), as we turn from empty, hungry bed/bench (see Oikonomides, "Byzantine House," 208–13) to the setting of the sun (and of day, life, empire?). For associations of sunset with old age, see Theodore Prodromos, *RD* I, line 1; Manass. *Chron.* 6335 (φθάσαντες ἐπὶ δυσμὰς βίου); Arist. *Po.* 1.1457B (τὸ γέρας δυσμαὶ βίου).

τρέμω, πτοοῦμαι, δέδοικα μὴ φονευθῶ πρὸ ὥρας,
καὶ χάσῃς σου τὸν Πρόδρομον, τὸν κάλλιστον εὐχέτην.

Such were my dread sufferings, almighty crowned lord,
my sore tribulations caused by a warring wife,
270 when she saw me coming home with empty hands.
Unless your loving mercy reaches unto me, sole ruler,
unless you satisfy her lust with gifts and favors,
I tremble, terror-stricken, lest untimely murder
deprive you of your Prodromos, your best congratulator.

Interpreted in the context of games and play, the episodic structure of poem I fulfils Prodromos' initial claim to "laugh and play" in earnest. By casting himself at the end in the victim's role as a mendicant outcast, Prodromos assumes an aura of sanctity.

POEM III: A DARKER HUMOR?

We pass over the shortest of the four poems (II), in which the impecunious members of the householder's family are reduced to eating their own clothes/estate (with strange and dangerous results, implying heresy and alchemy), and turn now to poem III, addressed to the emperor Manuel I (1143–80), by the novice monk, or "rag-wearer." He is verbally and otherwise abused, while the hierarchs indulge in all conceivable (and inconceivable) delectations of bathtub, food, and wine. They get every fish and the very best of seafood "laid before them" (κεῖμενα), and drink from decorated cups of the best Samian and Chiot wines, while we are fed on what they baptize as "holy broth" in dirty claypots. They get a "true baptismal font" of finest fish stew, we just get twenty onion-rings, with a few stale crusts and three drops of holy oil thrown into boiling water in a massive old cauldron, green with verdigris.

The contents of the hierarchs' repast, served in what is playfully but subversively termed a "baptismal font," are described in detail tantamount to a recipe (III.174–94). But the "fish stew" is not as innocent as it may sound, coming as it does right after a full array of four rich courses—broiled, sauced, sweet-and-sour, grilled with spices—of every kind of fish the Black Sea could boast of (including turbot cooked with labrus, tender bream, gray mullet three palms long, and flatfish, or "citharus linguatula"). Prodromos has exploited Constantinople's rich fish supplies to add to the range of sexual reference to "tasty bits of roasted meat" familiar from Attic comedy. What is more, he wishes a second "Akrites" (like Herakles) could enter their refectory fray and smash their heinous "dishes" into smithereens. Humor in this episode depends on wordplay and bilingual puns.

What is ἁγιοζοῦμι? It is frequently mentioned in the monastic *typika* as a fasting "holy broth," meant to be simple but nourishing; but Prodromos puns on ἰοζοῦμι ("viral swill"). He also puns on the twenty "rings of onions" thrown into boiling water, calling them καλολέοντας ("good lions," throughout), which unimaginative editors have emended into κολέντας ("rings," from the Venetian *coleta*, "ring," "chain"). The suffix λιώντας suggests a champion wrestler or jousting. A few lines later he has "Good Lion" engaging with "Fat Thug" (Χοντρός) in a wrestling match, with clear sexual connotations, as in the carnival games and jousting with his wife of poem I, with the difference that in poem III

the connotations are homosexual; indeed, the filthy cauldron of “viral swill” reminds us of the bathtub in which, as a novice, he was forced to “rub up” the two fat hierarchs (III.107–16). We are back with the theme of games and play with a funny but sinister and obscene twist.

Now to our passage, transmitted in differing forms in most manuscripts, but relegated by Hesseling and Pernot to the critical apparatus (325a-u). Here is the version transmitted in manuscript H, probably the oldest witness of poem III:

- [311 Ἐκεῖνοι τρώγουν βαθρακούς, ἡμεῖς δὲ τὸ ἀγιοζοῦμιν·]
 325a ἐκεῖνοι τὰ λαβράκια καὶ τοὺς τρανοὺς κεφάλους,
 b ἡμεῖς δὲ τὸ βρωμόκαπνον ἐκεῖνο τὸ ἀγιοζοῦμιν·
 c ἐκεῖνοι τὰ γοφάρια, τὰς ὕσκας, τὰ ψησσία,
 d ἡμεῖς δὲ πάλιν τρώγομεν αὐτὸ τὸ . . . πῶς τὸ λέγουν·
 e –ἔχει γὰρ ὄνομα σαλόν, παράξενον ὁκάτι,
 f καὶ τσιγαρίζεται κανεῖς ὥς οὐ νὰ τὸ ἐπιτύχη.
 h –Ἐπνιξα τώρα, ἀπέθανα, σκουλίκιν νὰ τὸ κόψη . . .
 i Ἔδε τὸ λέγουν κάθισε τινὰ ὅταν σπουδάξεις·
 j ἔδε κεφάλιν σκορδαψόν [σὲ δῶσιν], δοκῶ ὅτι ἐμαγεύθης!
 k Ἐδάρτε ἂν ἦσαν κέφαλοι, ψησσία, φιλομήλες·
 l ἂν τύχη νὰ τὸ ἐπίτυχα καὶ ἔδε μυστήριον μέγα!
 m Δέσποτα, νὰ ἔχης τὴν εὐχήν, μὴ οἶδες πῶς τὸ λέγουν;
 n Εἰς τὴν γλώσσαν μου γυρίζεται, δαῖμον, ἀνάθεμά σε!
 o Χαρίσου τὸ ὑδρόληκον, πλήρης ἐπέτυχά το,
 p ἔδε τὸν βρώμον ποῦ ἔκειτο καὶ ἐγὼ ἐτσιγαρίζομην·
 q πείσμαν ἐθέκασιν αὐτοὶ νὰ μὲ τὸ παραβάλουν,
 r ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ ἡμουν χωρικὸς νὰ μὴ τὸ κρού’ νὰ ἐξάπτῃ·
 s Αἶ, θλίψιν, δέσποτα, πολλὴν τὴν ἔχω εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν μου,
 u ἡμεῖς δὲ ταῦτα λέγομεν ἅπαντα τὰ λεχθέντα.²⁷

325h ἐπληξα cett. | 325i τινὲς V, τὰ CSA | 325o HVSA. ὑγρόληκον
 g, ὑδρόκληον C

²⁷As in I.172–97, the sexual innuendoes have close ancient precedents. Examples include the following:

325c. ὕσκας, f.: a rare word, possibly to be associated with ἵσκαί, “fungus growing on oaks and walnut trees” (Latin *esca* “bait”), used for cautery (LSJ); seal, R. Volk, *Byzantina Vindobonensia* (Vienna, 1991), 299–311; sturgeon (A. Alexakis, Dumbarton Oaks, hagiography database project). It also suggests ἰσχάς, “dried fig,” and ὕσσακας, “little piggies,” both attested for “cunt”: Hippon. 124; Ar. *Ach.* 802; *Lys.* 1001. On ὕκη and ὕς as “unidentified fish,” see D. W. Thompson, *A Glossary of Greek Fishes* (London, 1947), 272–73; more generally, see also C. F. Tinnefeld, “Zur kulinarischen Qualität byzantinischer Speisefische,” in *Collected Papers Dedicated to Kin-ichi Watanabe*, Studies in the Mediterranean World, Past and Present 11 (Tokyo, 1988), 155–76. I thank my learned colleagues for their suggestions, but I suspect that Prodromos knew these different meanings too, and was playing upon them all.

325k. φιλομήλες, f.: a kind of fish; cf. Meliteniotes 1425: ξιφίαι καὶ συάκια σὺν φιλομήλαις ἵσκαίς, the word also suggests the mythical Philomela, and the epithet φιλόμηλος, “fond of apples” [?tits]; Doroth. ap. Athen. 7.276.

325j. σκορδαψόν, m.; cf. poem I.22: see above, p. 94.

325o. ὑδρόληκον, n.: this *hapax legomenon*, attested in a majority of manuscripts, is coined on the analogy of the prefix ὑδρο- + substantival suffix; cf. ὑδρόγαρον, “fish sauce cooked in water”; ὑδροκέφαλον, “water on the head; hydrocephalus”; ὑδροκισσοκήλη, “aneurysm of the vessels of the testicles”; ὑδροκόμιον, “gum water”; ὑδρόκοιλος (or ὑγρόκοιλος), “having moist faeces.” As for the suffix -ληκον, the fem. ληκὼ indicates “penis”; cf. ληκάω, λαικάζω (λήκημα), for “sexual intercourse”; Pherekr. (LSJ). By consonantal metathesis, the suffix -κέλης would indicate “courser, cock riding-horse; yacht” = “vagina”; Ar. *Pax.* 894. The suffix -ληκος phonetically invokes -λυκος; cf. proverb ἐκ λύκου στόματος of “getting something in

311 [They are eating frogs, we get the “holy broth”] . . .
 325a They feed on the best sea bass, and huge [red mullet] too,
 b we get that stinking smokey “holy poison broth”;
 c they get fat fish and seal steaks, truffles, dabs,
 d while we were eating that old what’s-its-name:
 e it does have a crazy name, it’s just a trifle strange
 f and a man gets sizzled up before he hits on it . . .
 h I’m drowned, I’m dead, let the worm cut it out,
 i look, they say “Slow down!” just as you want to come.
 j Come now, shit head, I think you are bewitched!
 k If only mullet, dabs, and tit-bits had found their way down here,
 l then I might hit upon the word, –Behold, a mystery ensues!–
 m Lord, with my blessing, you know its name so well,
 n it’s here upon my tongue tips, –Devil, curses on you!–
 o Enjoy the leaky bag, I just got it in the mouth,
 p so here’s its food and mess, while I was being sizzled.
 q They were quite determined to shove it up me,
 r but I was no village boy, not to puke it out with fire.
 s Eh, how much sore chafing, lord, have I upon my soul,
 u yet do we speak out all things as have been uttered in.

In this passage, Prodromos comes nearest to what Jeffrey Henderson has termed “primary obscenity,” in that it is hard to read “innocently.”²⁸ Yet even here, the humor depends on double entendres, achieved through wordplay, punning, and above all by the metaphorical associations of food, wine, and sex. And beneath the games and play there lies a deadly serious purpose—to expose the filth, corruption, and abuse experienced by the lowly monks in the Philotheou monastery.²⁹ He also wants to get transferred to another monastery (the Mangana), where Theodore Prodromos actually served. Read in the context of monastic reforms debated during the later twelfth century, poem III touches on issues no less topical than does poem I.³⁰

As to the possible sources of Prodromos’ comic humor, both light and dark, there is evidence to suggest a connection between Prodromos’ use of the vernacular and the twelfth century’s rediscovery of ancient comic tradition. Literary discovery of the vernacular can be linked with the twelfth century’s renewed interest in Aristophanes and the

the mouth, praeter spem”; Zen. 3.48, and lascivious connotations of prefix λύκο- (as in the case of Lykainion, who initiated young Daphnis in sexual matters, Long. *DC* III.17).

325p. βρώμος, m.: “stink, noisome smell”; LXX Jb. 6.7, Gal. 7.214.

“Viral swill” seems to be none other than shssss. . . , associated with the mire (borboros) to which the evil shall be damned eternally. Here, Prodromos adapts Aristophanic and Lucianic images of Underworld torments of the damned to a 12th-century context, as is also the case in *Timarion*, ed. R. Romano (Naples, 1974), chap. 46, 1173–74.

²⁸J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy*, 2d ed. (New York, 1991), 35–41. It is surely relevant to Prodromos’ revival of obscene humor in the 12th century that, as Henderson (*ibid.*, 13) points out, with the exception of the Ionic iambic poets and the cults of Dionysos and Demeter, obscenity is not found elsewhere in the surviving literature of the time.

²⁹The monastery, situated five miles up the Bosphoros at Anaplous (modern Arnavutköy), was founded ca. 1022–53; see R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l’Empire byzantin*, vol. 1, *Le siège de Constantinople et le patriarcat œcuménique*, pt. 3, *Les églises et les monastères*, 2d ed. (Paris, 1969), 494, and *idem*, *Constantinople byzantine: Développement urbain et répertoire topographique*, 2d ed. (Paris, 1964), 510.

³⁰See Kazhdan and Epstein, *Change*, 87–92; P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180* (Cambridge, 1993), 298–99.

comic tradition, as is evident from John Tzetzes, author of voluminous scholia on Aristophanes' plays. He describes in a letter his fascination, albeit disapproving, with the language of fisherwomen on the Bosporos.³¹

DATE AND AUTHORSHIP OF THE PTOCHOPRODROMIC POEMS

We come now to the final and most controversial question: What evidence is there, for or against, for the dating of the four Ptochoprodromic Poems to the twelfth century and for or against authorship by Theodore Prodromos? Let us consider first the remaining evidence against Prodromos, since we have already dispensed with arguments of language and literary style. According to S. D. Papadimitriou, Paul Magdalino, and others, "incontrovertible evidence" that Prodromos was dead by the 1150s may be found in Mangana Prodromos's poem 37.³²

- Ναί, στόμα, στάξον Ὑμηττὸν ἐκ γλυκερῶν χειλέων,
εἰπὲ καὶ λόγον ζωτικὸν καὶ ζήσω καὶ σκιρτήσω,
εἰπὲ καὶ ζῶσάν σου φωνὴν ζωὴν μοι χορηγοῦσαν.
ἰδοὺ τελέως ἤργησα, καὶ γὰρ ἐγγωνιάζω
25 καὶ κλῆρον ἔχω πατρικὸν τοῦτο τὸ νόσημά μου·
τρέμω καὶ τὴν ἐκμέτρησιν τοῦ κλήρου τῆς ζωῆς μου·
πτοεῖ με γὰρ ὁ Πρόδρομος, ὁ προδραμὼν ἐκεῖνος,
ὁ ῥήτωρ ὁ περίφημος, ὁ προτεθρυλ[λ]ημένος,
ἡ χελιδὼν ἡ μουσουργός, ἡ λαλίστατη γλῶττα,
30 μὴ τόπον ἐτοιμάζει μοι καὶ λίθον καὶ γωνίαν.
μονονουχὶ γὰρ προφωνεῖ καὶ προμαρτύρεταί μοι
καὶ ῥητορεύει καὶ θανὼν παρὰ νεκρῶν κευθμῶνι.³³
- Yes, mouth, drip Hymettos' honey from sweet lips,
speak the word of life and I will live and skip,
speak in your living voice, bestowing life on me.
See, I've grown quite idle, keeping to my corner,
25 and my father's portion is this my sore affliction,
while I tremble at the countdown of my lot in life.
That Prodromos, the one who ran before, he frightens me,
the renowned rhetor, whose fame was bruited as of yore,
the music-making swallow, the most loquacious tongue,
30 lest he is keeping me a place, a stone and corner.
It's as if he's calling me ahead, bearing prior witness,
rehearsing speeches, albeit dead, in the nooks of the departed.

It is true that the poem refers to Prodromos' death, but, rather than postulate that it refers to Prodromos' father, as do Kazhdan and Franklin, I suggest that it is just another Prodromic game with death and rebirth, as so often played out in the course of our four Ptochoprodromic Poems and in Theodore Prodromos' known works.³⁴ We may compare

³¹ John Tzetzes, *Epistulae* 57, ed. P. A. M. Leone (Leipzig, 1972), 79–84.

³² See S. Papadimitriou, "Ὁ Πρόδρομος τοῦ Μαρκανοῦ κώδικος XI.22," *VizVrem* 10 (1903): 102–63; Magdalino, *Manuel I*, 440.

³³ Theodori Prodromi, *De Manganis*, poem X, lines 21–32, ed. S. Bernardinello, *SBN* 4 (1972): 71.

³⁴ Kazhdan and Franklin, *Studies*, 88–89. For another poem by the Mangana Prodromos, who claims to be both "dead and alive," see ed. Bernardinello, I, 45–57, 70–71; cf. I, 6–9; VI, 211–17; VII, 1–15; X, 21–54 for similar ambivalence on allegorical references to language and animals.

the poem, composed by Theodore Prodromos in Homeric (and heroic) hexameters and in classical style, which resembles in detail our first Ptochoprodromic poem, on disease and sickness, except that it is composed in archaizing language and meter, appropriately modeled on Gregory of Nazianzos:

- Τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἡρωϊκά
- Νοῦσε, τί δαιμονίη με δαμάξαι; τίπτέ με, δειλή,
 ὥστε ράκος ρίκνωσας ἀπ' ὅστεόφιν δέ τε πάντα
 μυελὸν ἐκμύζησας, ἀτὰρ γε χαλάσας νεῦρα,
 σαρκία δ' ἐξεδαΐξας ἰδ' ἐγκατα πάντα λάφυξας
 5 χεῖλεσι πειναλέοισιν ὁμοῖα φωλάσιν ἄρκτοις
 ἢ κακοῖς δακτέτοισιν, ἐχιδνάσιν ἢ λέουσι;
 ζωὸς ἐγὼ νεκύεσσι, ἀτὰρ ζωῷς νέκυς εἰμί,
 ἀμφίβιον δέ μ' ἔθηκε βροτοῖς μερόπεσσι· Ἐρινύς·
 οὔτε λίην βιόουσι μετέσσομαι ἀμφ' ἀνέρεςσιν,
 10 οὔτε λίην φθιμένοισι, μέσσην δ' ἐπιτέμνω ἀταρπόν.
 ἡέρα μὲν πνεῖω καὶ ἡελίου βλέπω αὐγὴν
 καὶ λαλέω παθέων τ' αἰσθάνομαι ὅσσα με κεντεῖ·
 τοῖσιν ἐγὼ μούνοισιν ἐνὶ ζωῷσι μετρεῦμαι,
 τ' ἄλλα δὲ πάντα νέκυσσι εἴσκομαι.³⁵

- Of the same, heroic verses
- Blight, why hast thy noxious might so smitten me? Cad, why
 hast from my bones stripped all to tatters like a rag,
 sucked forth my brain sap, softened sinews too,
 feasted upon my flesh, gulped down all the guts
 5 with famished lips like unto lurking bears
 and foulest fanged monsters, vipers and lions?
 Alive among the dead, yet am I dead among the living,
 for 'tis a Fury set me to dwell amphibian midst mortal wights,
 not long shall I consort among the living, nor long among the dead, I cut a middle
 path.
 10 Yes, I breathe the air, see the rising of the sun,
 I can speak my woes, feel what pricks me.
 Thus, and only thus, am I counted midst the quick,
 for the rest, I am to be likened to the dead.

There is no good reason to doubt either the attribution in almost all the manuscripts of the four poems to Prodromos (or Ptochoprodromos) or their dedication to John II (poem I), to an unnamed sebastokrator (poem II), and to Manuel I (poems III and IV). That would date them to some time between the 1140s and the 1170s, when Theodore Prodromos was arguably still alive. Details in the proem to poem IV in some manuscripts suggest the 1180s.³⁶ By the mid-1100s, Prodromos' poems were well known, as is made clear from a letter addressed to Theodore Prodromos by Michael Italikos: 'Ο γοῦν παρὼν οὔτοσι παπᾶς Μιχαὴλ πλέον ἀέρας ἀναπνεῖ τοὺς λόγους τοὺς σοῦς, πάντα πεζὸν λόγον, πᾶν

³⁵See "Theodoros Prodromos. Historisches Gedicht LXXXVIII," ed. M. Tziatzi-Papagianni, *BZ* 86/87 (1993–94): 363–82, lines 1–15. My thanks to Agapitos and Roilos.

³⁶For a careful review of Prodromos' possible dates, see Kazhdan and Franklin, *Studies*, 87–104. On datable elements in poem IV (proem in manuscripts CSA), see J. Grosdidier de Matons, "Courants archaisants et populaires dans la langue et littérature," in *Actes du XV^e Congrès international d'Études byzantines* (Athens, 1976), 3–10, esp. 7, on excellence of critical apparatus in Hesseling and Pernot.

ἱαμβεῖον ἐπὶ στόματος ἔχων.³⁷ Passages from Theodore Prodromos' "Cat and Mouse War" can also be used to explicate the problematic proem to poem III (lines 8–17), where the narrator likens himself to the proverbial Ant, the rhetors and philosophers to Lions:

- Καὶ θαύμασον τοῦ μύρμηκος τὴν τηλικαύτην τόλμαν,
 πῶς ὅλως ἔξω γέγονε τῆς τοῦτου μυωξίας
 10 καὶ τρέχειν ἴσως ὥρμησε τοῖς ἰσχυροῖς θηρίοις,
 ἀκολουθῶν τοῖς ἵχνεσιν ἀφόβως τῶν λεόντων,
 τὴν τῶν ὀνύχων δύναμιν ποσῶς μὴ κεκτημένος.
 Ἐμὲ γὰρ σκόπει μύρμηκα, δέσποτα στεφηφόρε,
 κατὰ τῶν πόνων τὴν ἰσχὺν καὶ τὴν ἀκτημοσύνην,
 15 λέοντας δὲ τοὺς ῥήτορας μετὰ τῶν φιλοσόφων,
 οἵτινες εἰσι δόκιμοι στιχίζειν τε καὶ γράφειν
 καὶ συγγραφὰς βασιλικὰς, νικητικὰς ἐκπλάττειν.
- Just marvel then at such daring as the ant's,
 how he managed to get outside his mouse hole
 10 and darted at a running pace against the fierce wild beasts,
 following fiercely in the tracks of lions,
 although in no way furnished by the power of claws.
 Think, then, upon me as an ant, O crowned lord,
 as to the hard spareness and poverty of travails,
 15 and upon the rhetors and philosophers as lions,
 for verily are they esteemed in versifying and writing,
 and in composing heroic victory pieces.

But why should an ant have a mouse hole? Perhaps because μυωξία suggests any kind of underground nook or cranny in which refuge from the high and mighty can be sought. In "Cat and Mouse War," it is Tyrokleptes ("Cheese-snatcher") who urges escape from the mouse holes upon Kreillos ("Fleshy," or chief mouse) as the only path to freedom, not just access to food. In all these poems, hunger, deprivation, and death are rhetorical tropes that explore new paths to power and freedom, not least by means of varied linguistic registers and daring enjambment:

- Κρεῖλλος ἀλλ' οἰκτρότατοι καὶ φόβου πεπλησμένοι
 βίον σκοτεινὸν ἀθλίως μυωξίας
 ζῶμεν, καθὼς περ οἱ πεφυλακισμένοι . . .
 Τυποκλέπτης κἂν μὴ θέλωμεν, ἐσμέν ἐν μυωξίαις.
 Εἰ γὰρ προελθεῖν, ὡς λέγεις, θαρραλέως
 τολμήσομεν βαίνοντες ἀσχέτῳ δρόμῳ.³⁸

³⁷Michael Italikos, letter to Prodromos, from Philippopolis, after 1143, ed. P. Gautier, *Michael Italikos, Lettres et discours*, AOC 14 (Paris, 1972), 64. The text was first published by R. A. Browning, "Unpublished Correspondence between Michael Italicus, Archbishop of Philippopolis, and Theodore Prodromos," *BBulg* 1 (1962): 283–86. See further, Browning, *Studies on Byzantine History, Literature, and Education*, Collected Studies 59 (London, 1977), art. 6.

³⁸Theodore Prodromos, "Katomyomachia," lines 6–8, 14–16, ed. H. Hunger, *Der byzantinische Katz-Mäuse-Krieg* (Graz-Vienna, 1968), 80–82. There are further parallels between Ptochoprodromos and *Katomyomachia*, but in reverse, which lend support to my suggestion of a connection between the two texts: at *Kat.* 304, cat rushed at (ὥρμησε) Kreillos' son and killed him; at Ptochoprodromos III.11–12, ant rushes against (same verb); at *Kat.* 30, cat seeks out mice just as dogs "track down" (ἱχνηλατοῦσι) hares; at Ptochoprodromos III.11, ant will follow in tracks (ἵχνεσι) of lions. Lion imagery, especially in the context of chasing wild beasts, is commonly used by Mangana Prodromos for Manuel I's forays against the Turks (XXV, ed. Bernardinello, lines 58–61: campaign of 1146). For relevant Aesopean fables relating to the ant and lion, ant and beetle,

Katomyomachia

Fleshy: But most piteously and filled with fear
do we in mouse holes wretchedly a dark life
live, as though we were imprisoned . . .
Cheese-snatcher: Yes, we are in mouse holes, willy-nilly.
If, then, we are to come out, courageously
let us dare, treading in unchecked track.

Most remarkably, and to the best of my knowledge not previously noted with reference to the date and authorship of our four poems, is the evidence of Gregory Pardos. Pardos, bishop of Corinth, includes in his list of recommended reading (compiled before 1156) “Ptochoprodromos” and Nikolaos Kallikles among his contemporaries:

Ἐπεὶ οὖν καὶ τὰ ἱαμβεῖα λογογραφία τις ἐστὶν εὐρυθμος, ζηλούσθω σοι καὶ τὸ ἐνθυμηματικὸν ἐν αὐτοῖς· ἔχεις ἀρχέτυπον τὸν Πισίδην, νεωτέρους τὸν Καλλικλῆν, τὸν Πτωχοπρόδρομον καὶ εἴ τις τοιοῦτος· ἐν τοῖς παλαιοῖς τὸν Θεολόγον, τὸν Σοφοκλῆν, ἐκτὸς τῶν ποιητικῶν ἰδιωμάτων αὐτοῦ, τὰ εὐφραδέστατα τοῦ Λυκόφρονος καὶ εἴ τι τοιοῦτον.³⁹

Since, then, iambics are a rhythmic art of writing, let them be emulated by you along with the memorable quality in them. You have as model Pisides, more recently Kallikles, Ptochoprodromos, and so on. Among the older ones, the Theologian, Sophocles, apart from his poetic idioms, the most eloquent writings of Lykophron and so on.

Among older writers, Pardos recommends the letters of Alkiphron, genre exercises composed probably between the third and the fourth century A.D., in the form of fictitious letters exchanged among farmers, fisherfolk, parasites, and courtesans in Alkiphron’s own re-created Attic dialect of the fourth century B.C.⁴⁰ Pardos was the author of one of the first Byzantine treatises to address, with reference to Alkiphron, the use of dialect in ancient literature, a question discussed elsewhere by Prodromos.⁴¹ There is therefore a textual thread that links the twelfth-century creative rehandling of ancient genres with the use of the vernacular, and with our poems, coinciding with the twelfth-century revival of ancient comic, dialogic, novelistic, and satirical genres (Plato, the novels, Lucian). The lexical parallels between “Ptochoprodromos,” Aristophanes, and Alkiphron should be apparent from the parallels cited above and are all the more convincing because so many words in the Ptochoprodromic vocabulary are either very rare or new coinages based on words in older medical treatises.⁴²

ant and dove, lion and mouse, see B. E. Perry, *Aesiopica*, vol. 1 (Chicago, 1952), 365, 379, 385–86. A final parallel: at *Kat.* 366–78, cat is struck stone dead by a block of ancient wood, fallen from “on high” (ξύλον κατελθὸν τῆς ὑπερτάτης στέγης, Ptochoprodromos I.207). We may not conclude that the concurrence of passages infers a single author, but we may infer that the author of our four vernacular poems was not unacquainted with learned texts, both Byzantine and ancient.

³⁹Περὶ συντάξεως τοῦ λόγου, *Gregorio Pardos*, ed. A. Kominis (Rome-Athens, 1960), 129, lines 100–105.

⁴⁰Ibid., 128. On slender evidence, V. Becares dates Gregory to the reign of Leo VI: “Ein unbekanntes Werk des Gregorios von Korinth und seine Lebenszeit,” *BZ* 81 (1988): 247–48.

⁴¹“On dialects,” ed. G. H. Schaeffer (Leipzig, 1811). For disdainful reference to Alkiphron and Pardos, see N. G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars* (London, 1983), 184–90.

⁴²I am currently compiling a glossary for the bilingual edition under preparation by myself and Michael Hendy. Before checking each item in the TLG, I am hesitant to pronounce on the number of actual *hapax legomena*, but unusual words used with significant allusion to specific contexts include ἀναμανθάνω, III.7 (verify an oracle or statement with reference to military victory, Hdt. 9.101); ἀναρράπτω, περιρράπτω, I.85–86 (stitch up, repair, stitch all around, as after a lifesaving operation, Hierakos, ed. Hercher 484.22, Poll. 7.84). For a fascinating and learned analysis of 12th-century *schedographiai*, some composed by Theodore Pro-

CONCLUSIONS?

What conclusions can be drawn? Byzantinists have been all too ready to treat our poems as “non-sens indiscutables,” simply because they are in “mixed-up Greek.” They have also been reluctant to accept that vernacular texts, from the twelfth century on, can and should be treated with the same degree of seriousness as texts in the high style. Textual emendations and conflation of different manuscripts have been arbitrary. Yet, if Theodore Prodromos was the author of our four poems, as a mounting body of evidence suggests, the twelfth century provides the literary, cultural, and linguistic starting point for “modern” Greek, at the same time as “ancient” texts were rediscovered, edited, and performed. The twelfth century, as Michael Hendy, Alan Harvey, and Magdalino have shown from socioeconomic and cultural perspectives, was not one of decline, rather one of bewildering yet productive social diversification. Prodromos in the four vernacular poems spells out a timely if complex message for imperial rulers: they must pay serious attention to games and play in low-style language or else they will fall, as did indeed Constantinople to the Latins in 1204. Such is the wealth and specificity of detail afforded by the four poems here that we may be certain that they were not composed after that date, although they may have been revised by later scribes.

The poems’ literary and performative richness invites comparisons, directly or indirectly, with comic *topoi* of ancient literature and modern popular traditions, so long as we are careful to take account of historical and performative contexts. If modern Greek literature has its roots in the twelfth century, the twelfth century had at the same time revitalized Byzantine roots in the Greek, Roman, and other pasts, not least through the ploys of performance—games and play in the diverse spoken languages of the time.

A few final, yet unanswerable, questions remain: *How* may the poems have been performed at the Comnene court? Were they written, recited, or both, as the proem to poem I suggests? Did their performance include dialogue, mime, and “horseplay”? If we may answer the last question with reference to Theodore Prodromos’ *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* (IV.214–42), we may infer that imperial rulers then, as in mythical times, enjoyed a little slapstick and coarse humor, even if they were sometimes themselves the indirect targets.⁴³

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dromos with use of the vernacular and evidence of diglossic puns and word play, see I. D. Polemis, “Προβλήματα της βυζαντινής σχεδογραφίας,” *Ελληνικά* 45 (1995): 277–302.

⁴³ Byzantinists assure us that “there is no evidence” about how such texts as Prodromos’ four delightful poems may have been performed, and that during the 12th century the rhetorical theater excelled in literary and verbal humor alone. However, a careful reading of all texts attributed to Theodore Prodromos, and to the four 12th-century novels, suggests that low-life humor and slapstick comedy played a role.